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Advocating Awareness: The Development of Peter Handke's Concept of Language

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Abstract

Advocating Awareness: The Development of Peter Handke's Concept of Language

By Erica Umpierrez

Relatively early in his career, Austrian author Peter Handke took an idiosyncratic look at the area of language. His first full-length play, *Kaspar* (1967), about the legendary Kaspar Hauser explores human socialization through language. In *Kaspar,* Handke is establishing the processes and consequences of language acquisition, while in his second play, *The Ride Across Lake Constance* (1971), he presents how we use this tool. Therefore, Handke's second play affords a different insight into language because we are finally able to watch how language works between speakers. In the secondary literature there is a great deal of uncertainty about the reception of Wittgenstein in Handke's *Kaspar* and *The Ride Across Lake Constance.* Wittgenstein's influence on Handke has been either overestimated or underappreciated. I shall show, however, that the plays are not primarily the refutation or the explication of Wittgenstein's thoughts. Handke, like Wittgenstein, sees language as the key to our experience of reality and accordingly assigns great power to language. Never doubting the authority or necessity of language and language systems, Handke warns his readers to never stop questioning the extent to which this force is controlling and limiting us.

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Introduction:

Even as one of the most acclaimed and influential contemporary Austrian authors, Peter Handke is well accustomed to criticism as he has become one of the German languages' most controversial authors. In 2006, in justifying their decision to award him the prestigious Heinrich Heine Prize for literature in spite of his controversial pro Serbian stance during the Balkan wars, the jury argued that, "in his work, Peter Handke obstinately follows the path to an open truth. He sets his poetic gaze onto the world regardless of the public opinion and its rituals."[1] From the very beginning of his literary career Handke has written some of the most thought provoking literature of his generation seemingly indifferent to the reception of his works. Offending the audience[2] is taken in stride by Handke as he utilizes his works as a means to communicate his sometimes radical views and astute social commentaries. Relatively early in his career, he took an idiosyncratic look at the area of language.

His first full-length play, *Kaspar* (1967), about the legendary Kaspar Hauser explores human socialization through language. The play thus addresses head on a prominent question that would be raised in many of Handke's subsequent works, the relationship between language and reality. Interestingly, the author later expressed dissatisfaction with it and all of his works prior to his second play about language, *The Ride Across Lake Constance,* claiming that they were plays of "statement" rather than "presentment".[3] Even a cursory look at the two plays bears this out. In *Kaspar,* Handke is establishing the processes and consequences of language acquisition, while in his second

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[1] "Germans Divided over Prize for Pro-Serb Author Handke," *Deutsche Welle*2006.
[2] *Ofending the Audience* is even the title of one of Handke's earliest plays, published in 1966.
[3] Richard Gilman, *The Making of Modern Drama* (New York: De Capo Press, Inc, 1974)., p.283

play he presents how we use this tool. The *Ride Across Lake Constance* is a play composed entirely of conversations while *Kaspar* is completely devoid of them (Kaspar is never given the opportunity to speak with the prompters, they only speak *at* him). Therefore, Handke's second play affords a different insight into language because we are finally able to watch how language works between speakers. Both plays, however, seem to be, "caught between two conflicting notions concerning language and reality: a) that language and reality are one and the same and b) that language (words, narration, fiction) is incapable of reflecting, creating or being reality." [4]

Handke's investigation into the relationship between language and reality takes into account the thoughts of Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, who is often cited as Handke's greatest influence. Wittgenstein, whose major works are the *Tractatus Logico- Philosophicus* and *Philosophical Investigations,* is considered by many as the main representative of the "linguistic turn", one of the most influential philosophical developments of the 20th century. According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, the basic assumption in the *Tractatus* is that language is a picture of reality. In his *Philosophical Investigations,* Wittgenstein then reconsiders the nature of 'the word' and how it reflects reality.[5] In the prologue to his second work, Wittgenstein stated that the *Philosophical Investigations* could be best understood against the background of his old thoughts.[6] We can see them as amending or expanding upon his earlier arguments.

In the secondary literature there is a great deal of uncertainty about the reception of Wittgenstein in Handke's *Kaspar* and *The Ride Across Lake Constance.* Handke's

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[4] Dennis Vannatta, "Wittgenstein, Handke's *the Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, and the Language of Madness," *The Literary Review* 28, no. 4 (1985)., p. 608
[5] Ibid., p. 607
[6] *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford The Metaphysics Research Lab, 2002), s.v. "Ludwig Wittgenstein."

plays have been called the "the aesthetic counterpart of Wittgenstein's thought"[7] and the antidote to Wittgenstein.[8,9] I shall show, however, that they are not primarily the refutation or the explication of Wittgenstein's thoughts. Certainly in problematizing language Handke was aware of Wittgenstein's linguistic philosophy, but through my analysis, it will become clear that he only appreciated it eclectically. Therefore, I shall refer to it only when it becomes relevant to Handke's argument.

Wittgenstein saw language as the key to our experience of reality, claiming initially that the limits of our language are the limits of our world and later that all philosophical problems are linguistic problems. Handke too sees language playing an essential role with respect to human reality. He views it as requirement for communication, development, and socialization and values it accordingly, but he is also very aware of the social implications of the limits inherent in language. Through a close analysis of *Kaspar* and *The Ride Across Lake Constance*, the plays in which Handke concentrates on language's limiting effect on human freedom, we see that the author's primary concern surrounding language is awareness. Never doubting the authority or necessity of language and language systems, Handke warns his readers to never stop questioning the extent to which this force is controlling and limiting us. Once we begin to neglect language, once we stop realizing how we make use of it or how it makes use of us, we will end up in blind conformity. Even though such constant linguistic vigilance is extremely demanding and can lead to insanity, it is still the best bulwark against unthinking acceptance of linguistically embedded social control.

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[7] Gilman., p. 288

[8] His [Wittgenstein's] philosophy is often referred to as a therapeutic, a curative applied to stop us speaking nonsense. […] Handke's play is written as an antidote to the curative

[9] M. Read, "Peter Handke's *Kaspar* and the Power of Negative Thinking," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 24, no. 2 (1993)., p.139

Kaspar:

Police reports state that on May 26th 1828, a sixteen year old boy of unknown origins was found walking the streets of Nuremberg alone. After a long interrogation, police finally established that the boy went by the name of Kaspar Hauser, and that until the moment he was found, he had been kept in a darkened cell without any form of human contact.

> He had been kept in a closet for sixteen or seventeen years and consequently manifested the psychological development of a three year old child, unable to feed, dress or clean himself. The real Kaspar lacked language, and the ability to distinguish between two and three dimensional configurations; he was unaware of space and time as distinct concepts. Kaspar was simply unable to communicate meaning, either for his own needs or for social purposes.[10]

Before coming into the care and guidance of George Frederick Daumer, Kaspar only knew how to speak his name and a single sentence: "I want to be a cavalryman, as my father was."[11] After developing his intelligence and learning to communicate properly, Kaspar was able to tell his story, sparking worldwide interest about his life. This historical figure became an international phenomenon, appearing as the focal point of various literary works. In Germany, Hauser's popularization can perhaps be best attributed to Jakob Wassermann's *Casper Hauser oder Die Traegheit des Herzens (1908),* a novel chronicling the life of what the author considered to be a pure soul destroyed by society.[12] Almost sixty years after Wassermann had stimulated readers' curiosity, Handke brought the enigma of Kaspar Hauser back to the forefront of German

[10] Faye Ran- Moseley, *The Tragicomic Passion: A History and Analysis of Tragicomedy and Tragicomic Characterization in Drama, Film, and Literature* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1994)., p. 67
[11] Artur Joseph, "Nauseated by Language: From an Interview with Peter Handke," *The Drama Review* 15, no. 1 (1970)., p. 60
[12] William Diamond, "Jakob Wassermann's Weltanschauung " *Monatshefte fur deutschen Unterricht* 23, no. 6 (1931).

literature. Unlike his predecessors, Handke's "Kaspar" does not attempt a biographical interpretation of the character. The play's opening sentence reads: "The play *Kaspar* does not show how IT REALLY IS or REALLY WAS with Kaspar Hauser. It shows what IS POSSIBLE with someone."[13,14] Handke's portrayal of the character has little to do with the actual Kaspar Hauser. In fact, Handke utilizes him as a model rather than as a historical figure. In the historical Hauser, Handke found a person with the physical capacities of an adult, but the initial mental and social aptitude of an infant. However, unlike a child, at the age of sixteen a person has fully developed the capacity to learn and progress. Having been locked in an isolated cell for the entirety of his life, Kaspar lacks any sort of socialization when he encounters the world for the first time. As in the case of the boy raised by wolves, in Kaspar, Handke discovered a sort of linguistic myth[15]. The development that occurs throughout the play is possible only because it begins with this 'linguistic myth' of a language-less, physically mature adult encountering language for the first time.

Kaspar's slow entrance onto the stage through a backstage curtain is marked by struggle and bears a striking resemblance to a human birth. The character we finally see can barely stand, walk or even talk. He enters the audience's world as all humans do, as a "Tabula rasa" or blank slate. Human contact and societal influences have yet to leave their mark on him, yet to taint his innocence. By way of his "birth" Handke connects Kaspar to all humans and makes him into a representation of all mankind. Seeing him being born through the background curtain, the audience becomes aware that what is

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[13] Peter Handke, *Kaspar* (Bungay, Suffolk: The Chaucer Press, 1969).
[14] "Das Stück >Kaspar< zeigt nicht, wie ES WIRKLICH IST order WIRKLICH WAR mit Kaspar Hauser. Es zeigt, was MÖGLICH IST mit jemandem., p.7
Peter Handke, *Kaspar* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1967).
[15]Joseph., p.61

about to occur on stage, has the potential to happen to every person. Although Handke wants the audience to acknowledge a connection between his character and mankind, however, he simultaneously makes an effort to prevent it from relating to Kaspar on an individual level.

In the second scene, the audience realizes that Kaspar's face is actually a mask. This is only noticeable after two or three glances, so why does Handke even bother with a subtle lifelike mask? First, the mask serves to mark the starting point of the transformation Kasper undergoes under the influence of his prompters. It is described as "expressing astonishment and confusion", and contrasts with his later mask (and that of his clones) that "evince an expression of contentment"[16,17]. This change of masks shows that the "language torture" Kaspar undergoes in the first part of the play results in a state of contentment. Second, while not detracting from any of Kaspar's human qualities, the mask serves to distance the audience from the character in a Brechtian manner. The mask prevents the audience from forming a direct emotional identification with this figure, and the distance created is just enough to see Kaspar not as an individual, but as a generalized human. Through the mask, Kaspar becomes "astonishment" embodied, a generalized representation of the human situation at the beginning of life. Moreover, aside from the lack of individual facial features, Handke denies Kaspar all other personal characteristics. By never portraying Kaspar as a specific individual, Handke allows the audience to see the implications of Kaspar's fate for their own lives and society. The mask serves to emphasize Handke's previously made point that *Kaspar* is not a historical drama but a demonstration of what can happen to anyone (an ubiquitous anyone). This generalizing

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[16] Handke., p. 15 and p. 73

[17] "Ihr Ausdruck ist der Ausdruck der Verwunderung und Verwirrung"; "Die Masken haben jetzt den Ausdruck der Zufriedenheit"., p.10 and 62

and actualizing intent is further emphasized by altering the historic Kaspar's initial sentence from "I want to be a horeseman, as my father was once"[18,19] to „I want to be someone like somebody else once was".[20,21] Handke's 20th century Kaspar does not long to be a horseman like his father, but merely like someone else. By eliminating the historic object of imitation in this statement, he foregrounds a general human desire which will become problematic as the play progresses.

Although the only figure that is physically seen on stage is Kaspar (and his clones that appear in the concluding scenes), for the majority of the play, the dominant "characters" are actually a number of prompters. They interact with Kaspar strictly as voices from above, never revealing who they are, where they originate from, or what their intentions are. They remain total strangers, and neither Kaspar nor the audience is ever allowed to form any sort of connection with them. The stage directions give explicit details as to what kinds of voices the prompters should have:

> Their manner of speaking should be that of voices which in reality have a technical medium interposed between themselves and the listeners: telephone voices, radio or television announcers' voices, the voice that tells the time on the phone, the voices of automatic answering services of all kinds, the speech mannerisms of sports commentators, of stadium announcers, of narrators in the more endearing cartoons, of announcers of train arrivals and departures, of interviewers, of gym teachers who by the way they speak make their directions correspond to the sequence of the gymnastic movements, of language course records, of policemen as they speak through megaphones at demonstrations, etc, etc,etc[22,23]

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[18] Joseph., p. 60
[19] Ein solcher Reiter möchte ich werden, wie mein Vater gewesen ist
[20] Handke., p. 16
[21] Ich möcht ein solcher werden wie einmal ein anderer gewesen ist., p.12
[22] Handke., p.11
[23] Die Stimmen, die auf den Helden einsprechen, sollten, obwohl in ihrem Sinn immer ganz verständlich, die Sprechweisen von Stimmen sein, bei denen auch in der Wirklichkeit ein technisches Medium zwischengeschaltet ist: Telefonstimmen, Radio- und Fernsehansagerstimmen, die Stimmen der Zeitansage im Telefon, die automatischen Antworttonbänder (ZUGAUSKUNFT BITTE WARTEN), die Sprechweisen

Handke again separates the audience from the play by 'interposing a technical medium' between the voices of the announcers and what is actually heard. In the case of the prompters, there is a double alienation from the audience because not only are the prompters' voices de-individualized by the mediums they speak through, but they are invisible as well. There are no bodies to go with these voices, which further alienates them from their listener.

The media used to relay the messages of the prompters situate the play in the 20th century. Television, automatic answering services, and perhaps especially policemen speaking through megaphones at demonstrations are all part of the play's contemporary society. Handke makes a point of having the prompters speak through media relevant to a contemporary audience. In doing so, he shows the audience that the prompters serve to represent its current society. Furthermore, the stage directions permit the voices to change media throughout the play, thus allowing them to bring in additional features of modern society. Thus it is this society in general, not any particular social model, that begins working on Kaspar and is subjected to criticism in the process.

It is important to take note of the exact task the prompters are assigned in the play: to bring somebody to speak through speaking[24]. They intend to transform Kaspar from inarticulate to communicative. However, Kaspar is not completely mute at the beginning of the play; he has his original sentence, a sentence of his own. Even though he is in possession of these few words, however, he is unaware that they carry meaning. It is clear that for him they are not language, but noise. Thus, he first plays with intonation:

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von Fußballkommentatoren, von Stadionssprechern, von Kommentatoren in den lieblicheren amerikanischen Zeichentrickfilmen, von Ansagern der Zugankünfte und –abfahrten, von Interviewern, von Gymnastiklehrerinnern, die in der Sprechweise ihrer Bewegungsansweisungen sich dem Ablauf der Gymnastikbewegungen anpassen, von Sprachkursschallplatten, von Polizisten, wie sie bei Aufläufen durch Megaphone sprechen etc. etc. , p.7

[24] Handke., p 11

"He repeats his sentence, now giving it almost every possible kind of expression. He utters it with an expression of perseverance, utters it as a question, exclaims it, scans it as though it were verse. He utters it with an expression of happiness, of relief […]."[25,26] It becomes obvious that these words mean nothing to him. He repeats them mechanically as he gradually encounters his reality. The words he speaks are in no way related to the objects he sees or what he is experiencing. He repeats them only because he has no other way of expressing himself. Kaspar acknowledges this fact at the end of the play when he is in full command of his language:

> I saw and touched the snow. Thereupon I said the sentence: I want to be someone like somebody else was once, with which I wanted to express why the snow was biting my hands. […] and finally I said to myself: I want to be someone like somebody else was once, and wanted to know with that what the sentence, which I said to myself, what it actually means.[27,28]

Therefore, we cannot assume that Kaspar has any sort of language base. Lacking a semantic dimension, his sentence does not constitute language, but I would argue, Kaspar's identity. This sentence is the only thing he owns, the only thing giving him a sense of self. The prompters must build Kaspar's understanding of language from the ground up; but before teaching him how to speak, by instructing him in the various applications of language, they inform him of the reasons why he should learn language in the first place.

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[25] Handke., p.17

[26] „Kaspar [wiederholt] den Satz, jetzt mit fast allen möglichen Spielarten von Ausdruck. Er setzt ihn mit dem Ausdruck der Beharrlichkeit. Er setzt ihn mit dem Ausdruck der Frage. Er ruft den Satz aus. Er skandiert. Er spricht den Satz freudig. Er spricht den Satz erleichert. […]", p.12

[27] „Ich habe den Schnee gesehen und den Schnee angegriffen. Darauf habe ich den Satz gesagt: ich möcht ein solcher werden wie einmal ein anderer gewesen ist, womit ich ausdrücken wollte, warum der Schnee mich denn in die Hände beiβe. […] und endlich sagte ich zu mir selber: ich möcht ein solcher werden wie einmal ein anderer gewesen ist, und wollte damit wissen, was denn der Satz, den ich zu mir sagte, überhaupt bedeute.", p. 78

[28] Handke., p. 92-93

The principle reason they give is order. If anything lies in disarray, they say, language can remedy this. One can bring everything into order, including one's self, by talking away every disorder. Language thus serves to exorcize disorder and will change Kaspar from a confused creature into a person able to act according to society's code of conduct. However, what Kaspar (but not the audience) is unaware of is that the prompters, in ridding him of confusion and disorganization via language, are simultaneously placing him under their control.

Other than with order, speech is to provide Kaspar with the fundamental gift of knowledge. It will transform him from a primitive being to a developed person:

> you learn with the sentence that you are speaking a sentence, and you learn with the sentence to speak another sentence, just as you learn that there are other sentences, just as you learn other sentences, and learn to learn; and you learn with the sentence that there is an order and you learn with the sentence to learn order[29] ,[30]

The prompters are seemingly teaching Kaspar to "learn to learn", the process of learning itself. The ability to learn, however, is tied to order; Kaspar is only allowed to learn patterns, not individual and independent thinking. Learning is only a necessary tool that will allow Kaspar to become aware of the existence of order. Essentially, Kaspar needs to learn language so he can learn to follow the orders of the prompters. Learning should simply assist in Kaspar's development only to the point of making him conscious of the rules of society and his place within it. The fact that the prompters believe learning to be possible only through language demonstrates a Wittgensteinian view of language as the

[29] Ibid., p. 23

[30] „du lernst mit dem Satz, daβ du einen Satz sprichst, und du lernst mit dem Satz, einen anderen Satz zu sprechen, so wie du lernst, daβ es andere Sätze gibt, so wie du andere Sätze lernst, und zu lernen lernst; und du lernst mit dem Satz, daβ es Ordnung gibt, und du lernst mit dem Satz, Ordnung zu lernen.“, p18

only guarantor of knowledge. But in Handke's play, language is also the means by which Kaspar is controlled. Through language Kaspar is to have the capability not of freely exploring the world, but to acknowledge the existence of an order and learn how to follow that order.

As the prompters continue teaching Kaspar about language, they make his implicit dependency on it explicit: "You can no longer visualize anything without the sentence. You are unable to see an object without the sentence. Without the sentence you cannot put one foot in front of the other "[31,32] Once he learns to speak, Kaspar will forever be reliant on language in order to see and understand the world around him. If Kaspar now needs language to learn, see, and even place on foot in front of the other, then for all intents and purposes, he cannot continue to exist without it, and given that the prompters are the ones who control language, he will always be indirectly bound to the prompters. In the end, Kaspar himself acknowledges the pitfalls of having learned language and that reverting back to his pre-language independence became impossible as soon as he learned to speak: "Already with my first sentence I was trapped".[33, 34]

The whole premise of *Kaspar* is transformation, yet until his initial sentence is

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[31] Handke., p. 21-22
[32] „Du kannst dir nichts mehr vorstellen ohne den Satz. Ohne den Satz kannst du keinen Gegenstand sehen. Du kannst ohne den Satz keinen Fuß mehr vor den anderen setzen [...]", p. 17
[33] Handke., p. 96
[34] „Schon mit meinem ersten Satz bin ich in die Falle gegangen.", p. 82

completely destroyed, Kaspar is merely in a transitional state. The prompters disrupt and eliminate his original sentence by demonstrating the intricacies of language, playing with sentence structure, punctuation, and syntax. Kaspar absorbs what they are saying, and when he finally begins to speak again, he incorporates what he has learned into his original sentence. These variations of his initial sentence are part of the destruction and show its progression. However, it is not until the first full- sentence divergence from the original sentence, that any transformation is noticeable: "I want to be like somebody else like somebody else once was somebody else "[35,36] This slight change in the sentence indicates a change in Kaspar's initial desire. Rather than just being like somebody else, Kaspar now wants to be the imitation of an imitation. For this to be a possibility requires someone else to have mimicked another, and through this, Handke is commenting on the very nature of people and their inclination towards mimicry. By imitating another who has done the same himself, all humans eventually become replications of one another.

By disrupting Kaspar's initial sentence, the prompters have completed their first stage of reconstruction. "Because it fails to impose order on the world around him and because it is his sentence and not theirs, the *Einsager* systematically destroy it and replace it with a language whose expressive power is limited to the reiteration of social conformism."[37] Rather than allowing Kaspar to retain his sentence, his individuality, the prompters dismantle it and force their language and its rules onto Kaspar. He is needled

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[35] Handke., p. 25
[36] „Ich möcht ein solcher andrer werden wie einmal ein anderer solcher gewesen ist.", p.19
[37] Nicholas Hern, *Peter Handke: Theatre and Anti-Theatre* (London: Oswald Wolff Ltd., 1971).

into speaking by the use of speech, gradually moving from single to multiple words and from there to a "normal sentence". When he finally does utter his first complete sentence, the audience becomes aware that this process was not easy on him: "That time, when I was still there, my head never ached as much, and I was not tormented the way I am now that I am here."[38,39] It is only after he "gains" the ability to speak "a normal sentence"[40,41] that the effects of the prompters are visible.

As the play progresses, Kaspar not only reiterates the thoughts the prompters have engrained into his brain, but he also begins to act differently. He is now self aware, now realizes that his previous actions have led to the current unkempt stage (where the furniture is in complete disarray and nothing seems to be in order) and begins to correct his untidiness. As he is establishing order on stage, a significant shift occurs in both Kaspar's actions and the dynamic of the relationship between him and the prompters. „As he nears the completion of his task, his actions more and more obey the sentences of the prompters, whereas in the beginning the prompters' sentences adjusted themselves to his actions.“[42,43] The loss of his original sentence and the subsequent linguistic identification with the prompters have made Kaspar subservient to them.

It might seem counterintuitive to think that the power of speech would make one a slave to society because it is commonly seen as what makes humans superior to other animals. However, we must consider that what Kaspar is learning is a highly specific

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[38] Handke., p.31
[39] „Damals, als ich noch weg war, habe ich niemals so viele Schmerzen im Kopf gehabt, und man hat mich nicht so gequält wie jetzt, seit ich hier bin.“, p. 24
[40] Handke., p. 31
[41] "einen ordentlichen Satz"., p. 24
[42] Handke., p. 37
[43] Seine Handlungen wiederum gehorchen gegen Schluß immer mehr den Sätzen der Sprecher, während sich am Anfang die Sätze der Sprecher seinen Handlungen angepaβt haben., p. 29

speech because he learns to speak strictly by imitating the prompters. His language capabilities and in turn his knowledge are confined by what the prompters present him with. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that Kaspar starts to become exactly who the prompters want him to be. Interestingly, is this not an exaggerated representation of the way in which all humans learn language? Although we are not forced to be inundated with words like Kaspar is, we too learn language by imitating others (parents, teachers, peers, etc). Handke is examining the way in which humans learn to speak and questioning how these methods impose limitations on us.

The audience knows that Kaspar is finally acquiring and understanding language when he starts to act "normally", when he no longer just pronounces sounds or stumbles over his shoelaces. Kaspar's understanding of language is particularly noticeable when he starts to treat objects in a "correct" manner. For example, when he finally comprehends the use of a wardrobe and hangs his clothes inside it. According to Hamilton,

> We know [that Kaspar is correctly understanding language] because we see him come to use the word 'table,' for example, in one of the ways already familiar to us. But this does not explain how *he* [Kaspar] is to know. In fact this is left completely untreated in the play; and that gap itself contributes significantly to the feeling that meaning assignments are arbitrary and therefore under the control of the Prompters".[44]

Contrary to what Hamilton argues, Kaspar does have confirmation of whether or not he is "getting it right." A spotlight (most likely controlled by the prompters themselves) begins to follow Kaspar's every move as he is organizing the stage. The spotlight points to what needs to be ordered and does not move on to another object until the previous one has been brought into order.

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[44] James R. Hamilton, "Handke's Kasper, Wittgenstein's Tractatus, and the Sucessful Representaton of Alienation," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 9, no. 2 (1995)., p. 13

> *The spotlight follows Kaspar's hand which is buttoning his jacket from top to bottom. One button is left over at the bottom. The spot points to the leftover button, as does Kaspar's hand. Then it follows the hand as it unbuttons the jacket from bottom to top, but more rapidly than it buttoned it. Then it follows Kaspar's hand as it buttons the jacket once more, even more quickly. This time he succeeds. The spot and Kaspar's hands both point to the bottommost button. Then the hand releases the button. The spot reveals that everything is in order. Then it goes out.* [45,46]

This spotlight, however, does not weaken the latter portion of Hamilton's argument. It demonstrates the power in the hands of the prompters, for they control what is right and wrong. Meaning assignments are in fact completely dependent on the prompters because Kaspar has no other reference point. Even if they were to tell him something incorrect, he would be oblivious to the fact. Therefore, he is completely reliant on those who teach him to speak. Handke is confronting the audience with the idea that socialization is an arbitrary process, and that there are no moral, independent standards by which it takes place.

As Kaspar's fluency in the German language develops, he becomes increasingly similar to the prompters in his manner of speaking and acting. "At first he drawls his words, although speaking with intensity, without punctuation marks; then he begins to speak with full stops, finally with hyphens, finally he makes exaggerated sense, and ultimately he utters model sentences"[47,48] The model sentences are the peak of his

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[45] Handke., p. 35
[46] Der Scheinwerfer folgt Kaspars Hand, die von oben nach unten die Jacke zuknöpft, wobei schließlich unten ein Knopf übrigbleibt. Der Scheinwerfer zeigt wie Kaspars Hand auf den übriggebliebenen Knopf. Dann folgt er der Hand, die, schneller als sie die Jacke zugeknöpft hat, sie von unten nach oben wieder aufknöpft. Er bleibt oben mit Kaspars Hand auf dem ersten Knopf. Dann folgt er Kaspars beiden Händen, die noch schneller die Jacke wieder zuknöpfen. Diesmal gelingt es. Der Scheinwerfer zeigt mit Kaspars Händen auf den untersten Knopf. Dann geben die Hände den Knopf frei. Der Scheinwerfer zeigt, dass alles in Ordnung ist. Dann erlischt er., p.28
[47] Handke., p. 45
[48] Zuerst leiert er, gleichwohl intensiv sprechend, ohne Satzzeichen, dann spricht er schon Punkte, schließlich die Beistriche, schließlich übertrieben einen Sinn, schließich spricht er die Modelle der Sätze., p. 36

language acquisition and of his transformation from primitive being to „perfect person".
During the scene in which he is taught the model sentences, the "interaction" between the prompters and Kaspar becomes more orderly. Rather than speaking over each other or having the prompters merely speak *at* Kaspar, they take turns. His language abilities have become impeccable although he only uses them to utter nonsensical variations of the prompters' patterns. This scene is also the only time when the prompters and Kaspar speak in unison:

> It is untrue that the representation of the conditions is the only possible representation of the conditions: on the contrary, it is true that there exist other possibilities of the representation of the conditions. It does not correspond to the facts to represent the conditions at all; on the contrary, it corresponds to the facts [conditions[49]] not to represent them at all. That the conditions correspond to the facts is untrue. [50,51]

By speaking simultaneously with the prompters, Kaspar has become exactly like them. He no longer needs to be prompted to express these thoughts, but speaks them of his own free will. There is a distinct division in the passage they speak together. The first portion is, for the most part, true because subjectivity *does* allow for different representations of conditions. However, the second portion takes this thought a step further, expressing that what we say should not represent the conditions at all. Language is not responsible for being honest or true. It is its own entity, not accountable to truth or rules.

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[49] This is a faulty translation. It should read: on the contrary, it corresponds to the conditions not to represent them at all.

[50] Handke., p. 52

[51] Es ist unwahr, daβ die Darstellung der Verhältnisse die einzig mögliche Darstellung der Verhältnisse die ist: wahr ist vielmehr, daβ es im Gegenteil noch andere Möglichkeiten der Darstellung der Verhältnisse gibt. Es entspricht nicht den Tatsachen, die Verhältnisse überhaupt darzustellen; vielmehr entspricht es den Verhältnissen, sie überhaupt nicht darzustellen. Daβ die Verhältnisse den Tatsachen entsprechen, ist unwahr., p.42

It is in this passage that Wittgenstein's influence on the play becomes noticeable. If language does not have to abide by any external rules or truth then it is not only all powerful, but almost above society. It is an autonomous entity that, according to Wittgenstein, must speak for itself. Canfield and Shanker point out that

> a name has a meaning and a proposition has sense only within a calculus or language game, and the meanings of words are created by conventions, by rules, by definitions, by what Wittgenstein calls grammar. The grammatical explanations that create language are not accountable to any reality, and yet they establish the connection between language and reality whereby the former can represent and convey information about the latter.[52]

Not only is language not accountable to reality, but it is what gives something meaning and only via language can we understand reality. However, it is only through grammar that language has this kind of power. Grammar, the structure imposed on language, arbitrates meaning and reality. It is language's order that grants it its authority. What Kaspar gains by the model sentence is exactly that, grammar and order. He is able to correctly manipulate and utilize the intricacies of language and is therefore transformed into a prompter, by linguistic structure. "Handke's stated aim of 'encircling' his audience with words is a dramatization of how language functions upon us: closing us in within its own laws and restrictions, coercing our obedience to its forms, rules, limitations".[53]

In this same scene, by far the longest in the play, Kaspar learns the extent to which he must obey language:

> Say what you think. You can begin to speak. You must begin to speak. When you begin to speak you will begin to think what you speak even

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[52] John V. Canfield and Stuart G. Shanker, ed. *Wittgenstein's Intentions* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc, 1993)., p. 51

[53] Jeanette R. Malkin, *Verbal Violence in Contemporary Drama* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992)., p. 12

> when you want to think something different. Say what you think. Say what you don't think. When you have begun to speak you will think what you are saying. You think what you are saying, that means you can think what you are saying, that means it is good that you think what you are saying, that means you ought to think what you are saying, that means, on the one hand, that you may think what you are saying, and on the other hand that you must think what you are saying, because you are not allowed to think anything *different* from what you are saying. Think what you are saying[54,55]

The prompters argue that speech will influence thought and change Kaspar's perception of reality. In this they are suggesting, as many of Wittgenstein's contemporaries did, thoughts on linguistic relativity in which language is seen to limit and even determine thought. In a classically cited passage by Sapir, one of the creators of the principle of linguistic relativity, it is maintained that:

> It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built upon the language habits of the group.[56]

At an unconscious level, language controls and creates reality, and the way in which one sees the world is determined by one's speech habits. If so, then language is necessary in order to understand reality and for expression of thought, and it may even be required before either can ever occur. Handke then examines the implications of the play's philosophical basis by showing where exactly Kaspar learns language.

Again we must consider that Kaspar is learning to speak strictly by imitating the

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[54] Handke., p. 56-57

[55] „Sag, was du denkst. Du kannst anfangen zu sprechen. Du muβt anfangen zu sprechen. Wenn du zu sprechen anfängst, wirst du zu denken anfangen, was du sprichst, auch wenn du etwas anderes denken willst. Sag, was du denkst. Sag, was du nicht denkst. Wenn du zu sprechen angefangen hast, wirst du denken, was du sagst. Du denkst, was du sagst, das heiβt, du kannst denken, was du sagst, das heiβt, du sollst denken was du sagst, das heiβt, es ist gut, daβ du denkst, was du sagst, das heiβt, du sollst denken, was du sagst, das heiβt sowohl, dass du denken darfst, was du sagst, als auch, daβ du denken muβt, was du sagst, weil du nichts *anderes* denken darfst als das, was du sagst, Denk, was du sagst.“, p. 45

[56] Daniel Chandler, "The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis" http://www.lex.unict.it/elearning/dirittomedievale/letture/svolta_linguistica.pdf.

prompters. The prompters control Kaspar's language and thus control his thoughts:

> If you see an object differently from the way you *speak* of it, you must be mistaken: you must say to yourself that you are mistaken and you *will* see the object [correctly]: if you don't *want* to say that to yourself [right away], then it is obvious that you want to be forced, and really want to say it after all[57] [58]

Kaspar is taught that language is more real and true than sight. If he does not see something the way the prompters want him to, then he must be mistaken, and he must use the language he has learned to correct himself. Therefore, in actuality, seeing things 'correctly' is not a choice, but a mandate. Even if Kaspar wanted to see things in his own way, have his own thoughts, he would not be capable of doing so. He would be forced into agreeing with the prompters. Further, based on Hern's previous observation that Kaspar's expressive power is limited to the reiteration of social norms, "even if Kaspar were to think non-conformist or just individual thoughts, he would have no language to express them".[59]

"In *Kaspar* Handke is accepting Wittgenstein's view of the limitability of language but is illustrating what happens when the limits are set by the 'wrong' people."[60] According to Hern, the prompters utilize a language steeped in bourgeois values and thus the play is clearly indicating that the 'wrong' people are part of the political Right. As mentioned above, however, Handke affirms that no particular political ideology is being criticized. Therefore, perhaps Hern was correct in his initial argument that the prompters merely serve to represent any movement that limits thought by controlling language. Even if the prompters have no specific political association, it is

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[57] Handke., p. 58-59
[58] Wenn du den Gegenstand anders siehst als du von ihm sprichst, muβt du dich irren: du muβt dir sagen, daβ du dich irrst, und du wirst den Gegenstand richtig sehen: willst du es dir nicht gleich sagen, so ist es klar, daβ du gezwungen werden willst, es also schlieβlich doch sagen willst., p. 47
[59] Hern., p. 72
[60] Ibid., p. 73

easy to draw parallels between their voices and those of people in power. The prompters are the voice of authority throughout the play, demanding Kaspar's obedience and controlling his thoughts and actions. It is undeniable that they represent control and power.

This fact is given further support during the intermission, when texts are "piped through the loud speakers into the auditorium, into the lobbies, and even out to the street"[61] [62]. These texts are a combination of the prompters' speeches, noise, and taped speeches of real contemporary party leaders, popes, presidents, prime ministers, etc. What is heard are not complete thoughts or sentences, but fragments of speeches mixed together. For example, "Don't think of what your country can do for you but climb up the wall."[63,64] Thus, even during the intermission, the audience is never allowed to escape the prompters or society. The text is intended to interrupt the conversations between audience members and disturb them as the prompters do Kaspar. Through this similarity, Handke is demonstrating the source of the language Kaspar is taught, demonstrating who exactly has been torturing Kaspar. Handke is arguing that the prompters are the opinion-makers of our society (popes, party officials, prime ministers, etc). Moreover, by using speeches from contemporary society, he creates a bridge between the outside world and the play. These speeches have had a great impact on the lives of the audience and resonate with tremendous emotive force. By allowing these speeches to act upon the audience in a manner analogous to the way that the prompters words act on Kaspar,

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[61] Handke., p. 69
[62] Nach einigen Augenblicken hören die Zuschauer durch alle Lautsprecher, im Zuschauerraum wie auch in sämtlichen Vorräumen, womöglich bis auf die Straβe hinaus, zunächst halblaut und kaum verständlich die PAUSENTEXTE.
[63] Handke., p. 70
[64] Man muβ nicht nur herumstehen sondern auch die Mauern niederreiβen., p.58

Handke is suggesting that the prompters are not just some soulless, fictional 'big brother' force, but come from our own society. As Malkin points out,

> not only is the audience shown to suffer the same fate as Kaspar [during the intermission], it is also accused of participating in Kaspar's destruction: "goats and monkeys." The words which destroy Kaspar are their words, our words; and the value of order which necessitates Kaspar's torture is lifted from the world of the audience, not invented by Handke[65]

Before Kaspar's destruction, however, there is an instant when he is a perfect person, even by the author's own standards: "He becomes perfect, more and more perfect a real human being; finally he speaks in verse and, when the greatest possible order has been arranged onstage, in beautiful verse. The world has become a poem to him."[66] During this stage, Kaspar has full command of language and delivers a poetic monolog describing the transformation he underwent after having acquired language. From the prompter's perspective, Kaspar's perfection during this monolog is easily evident. He not only reiterates their ideals, but also delivers the lines with eloquence. However, Handke's claim to Kaspar's perfection seems almost contradictory to his argument throughout the play. Why would Handke imply that Kaspar has reached the height of his development when he seems most conformed to society's expectations? Kaspar makes a noteworthy comment within this discourse: "At one time I only spoke when asked,/ now I speak on my own accord, but now/ I can wait to speak until I am asked."[67 ,68] Kaspar has gained control of not only how, but also when to speak. He can now speak on his own accord and is thus perhaps not completely dominated by the prompters. But on the same line, he adds that all this control of when to speak does is to allow him to wait until he is

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65 Malkin., p.35

66 Jospeh., p. 60

67 Handke., p. 68

68 Habe ich früher immer nur geredet, wenn ich gefragt/ wurde, so rede ich jetzt von selber, aber jetzt/ kann ich mit dem Reden warten, bis ich gefragt/ werde., p.57

spoken to. Further, he states, "I am quiet now/ I do not want to be someone else any more/ nothing incites me/ against myself any more."[69 ,70] Through these lines we see a feeling of contentment and harmony within Kaspar, for he is satisfied with his position in language and life. Through him, Handke acknowledges that having a command of language is vital, but that knowing when and how to use language according to the rules is what makes us 'perfect'. In this scene, the last one before the intermission, Handke thus presents the play's greatest paradox: that the moment of greatest linguistic achievement is also the pinnacle of social conformism. The end result of acquiring language is that he wants to be still.

The final segment of the play begins by Kaspar reciting a sort of hymn, expressing a hesitant calm and explaining his pre-linguistic disorderly state. This calm comes from being able to placate his fear and confusion with language. He then continues by reciting the dictums of social order: "Everyone must be free/everyone must be able to see/ everyone must know what he wants/no one should be bothered by anyone's taunts/ no one may miss/the drill/ no one may kill/ himself or anyone else […]"[71, 72] Interspersed between "true" statements are irrelevant, and in some cases even completely untrue, statements as well. However, because they are grammatically correct and follow the same structure as the true dictums, the inconsistencies between the statements are not overt. The audience does not doubt the validity of each line because it is stylistically similar to the previous one; the content is hidden behind correct form, the fallacies concealed by language structure. Up until the moment in which Kaspar's speech changes from hymn to

[69] Handke., p. 68
[70] Ich bin still/ ich möcht jetzt kein anderer mehr sein/nichs mehr hetzt/mich gegen mich auf.
[71] Handke., p. 84
[72] „Jeder muβ frei sein/jeder muβ dabei sein/ jeder muβ wissen was er will/ keiner darf den Drill /vermissen/ lassen/ keiner darf sich morgens hassen"

dictums of social order, the other Kaspars stand silently in the background. As Kaspar continues his recitation of the prompter's ideals, the other Kaspars start to make a significant amount of noise. The noise gets increasingly louder, interrupting the original Kaspar, and at times, they join in on what he is saying in an almost mocking manner. Their distractions continuously confuse Kaspar until he loses his train of thought: "What was it that I said just now? […] *Even while he is asking himself these questions, he, like the other Kaspars, begins to giggle and the like. At the same time the prompters sing his previous verses to the end.*"[73,74] After repeating platitude after platitude, what sets in is an inability to connect to what he is saying. The platitudinous nature of the language he has produced leads to its own annihilation because it, in a sense, no longer registers. The original Kaspar is now indistinguishable from his clones, while all of them have become products of the prompters.

This idea of social conformism is represented by six additional Kaspars that appear on stage before intermission. Each one is identical to the original Kaspar in appearance, but lacks the ability to speak. They make their entrance into the play by physically acting out an idea expressed by a prompter. For example, a Kaspar enters the stage and holds a burning match between his fingers as a response to "pain" from the prompters. The other Kaspars do not contest their role as pawns to the prompter's desires; they merely do exactly as they are told. The play reaches intermission at the pinnacle of conformity, represented by the other Kaspars and expressed by Kaspar's aforementioned monolog. After the intermission, in order to assure their success or perhaps to prevent

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[73] Handke., p. 90-91

[74] „Was habe ich doch gerade gesgt? […] *Noch während er sich das fragt, fängt er, wie auch die anderen Kaspars, zu kichern und dergleichen an. Zur gleichen Zeit singen auch die Einsager seine vorangegangenen Verse zuende.", p. 75-76*

Kaspar from challenging their teachings, the prompters utilize violence. They point out its necessary function in the creation and maintenance of order. Then the original Kaspar appears as the six Kaspar clones arrange themselves in an orderly fashion on a sofa and begins speaking rhymed verse in a voice similar to those of the prompters. Far from speaking of his own accord, Kaspar has now completely adjusted to their speech and is consequently robbed of both his individuality and potential for creativity. As Read points out, "[a]ny emancipation through language, and any linguistic expression of genuine individuality are rendered impossible within this positively standardized form"[75]. Like the other Kaspars, the original has become an image of conformism; and now, the prompters urge Kaspar to become more than just a conformed member of society. He is to become an instructor of this very conformism:

> Those who have been put in order- instead of retreating into themselves and fleeing society- should now make a real effort without being compelled to or thrashed but out of their own free will to show new paths by looking for sentences that are valid for all: it is not so much that they *can* choose but that they *must* choose and tell the others- without empty sayings or blown –up phrases- the unadorned truth about themselves: and the others too should finally be able to want to do what they themselves want, ought and can do. [76, 77]

After having learned to speak himself, Kasper must force others to conform via language as well. The prompters now expect Kaspar to become a prompter himself and take part in extending order throughout society.

These clones present an interesting paradox. On the one hand, by their very nature they seem to represent adjusted, conforming, compliant citizens. On the other hand, it is

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[75] Read., p. 144
[76] Handke., p. 78
[77] Die in Ordnung Gebrachten- statt sich in sich selber zurückzuziehen und die Gesellschaft zu fliehen- sollen jetzt reell danach trachten ohne Zwang und Schläge aus eigener Kraft neue Wege zu zeigen indem sie nach für alle gültigen Sätzen suchen: sie können nicht wählen sie müssen wählen und den andern ohne Phrasen und Sprechblasen die Wahrheit über sich selber erzählen: auch die andern sollen endlich wollen können was sie selber jetzt wollen sollen können., p. 66

interesting that they first enter the stage after the prompters' declare: "You've been cracked open."[78] [79] This leads some to theorize that these figures represent splinters of the original Kaspar, fragments of his subconscious. It is through the latter interpretation that their later disruptions of Kaspar's hymn become logical, for why would ideal citizens be interrupting Kaspar as he is reciting the dictums of their ordered society? On a subconscious level, represented by the other Kaspars, the original is aware of the trap he is falling into and wants to prevent this from occurring. The self-assured and rational Kaspar is a construction of the prompters who has become completely estranged from his subconscious, "the voice of the unconscious self which points back to the dark behind the symbolic curtain to an irrationality that coexists with the world of Reason but is suppressed or repressed in the individual"[80]. As the prompters claim, this irrationality poses a threat to an ordered society and must be completely avoided through structured language. The prompters have taught Kaspar language so as to maintain order. However, subconsciously, Kaspar is not willing to abandon this irrationality completely. By fully giving in to the prompters' language and subsequent control, Kaspar would have to ignore his subconscious and lose those dimensions in his personality. The irrationality he is being forced to repress via language is tied to the last shred of individuality Kaspar has. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Kaspar's subconscious would attempt to prevent him from fully falling under the control of the prompters.

Before his final destruction, Kaspar changes the recitation of his biography from a hymn-like structure to prose. "Further, whereas the previous self-history follows the Prompters' torture sentences and leads to Kaspar's acceptance of order, this

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[78] Handke., p. 59
[79] „Du bist aufgeknackt.", p. 48
[80] Read., p. 135

[prose]confession follows Kaspar's rejection of orderly language"[81] Throughout this speech, the other Kaspars once again grow continuously more disruptive while Kaspar's speech degrades accordingly. The play ends in utter chaos with Kaspar, unable to form complete sentences, chanting "goats and monkeys". This madness found a variety of interpretations, and according to Read,

> [i]n Kaspar's incipient madness, which becomes increasingly evident in the closing scenes of the play, the cause of the imbalance is recognizable: it is the linguistically controlled and rationalized experience prescribed by the modern world, through which the individual is reduced to a one-dimensional, denatured *ratio,* and the world to operational concepts. [82]

For Malkin, however, Kaspar's insanity is not a result of imbalance but rebellion. "It refers to a possible course of revenge available to the individual who through 'derangement' rebels against the system by refusing to allow it to operate through him."[83] Malkin argues that Handke is saying that perhaps that madness is preferable to the state of social conformism the prompters' are advocating. Regardless of the origins of his insanity, it is vital to note that before his final destruction, there is a moment of self-reflection when Kaspar becomes aware of the state he is in. He stops to consider what exactly he has been saying this entire time, what exactly he has become. Only once he reflects on the extent of language's control over his life, does his insanity set in. Schlueter points out that, "we may just as readily be jolted into a constructive awareness as into death when we recognize the fragility of the relationship between language and reality, and it is this kind of awareness that Handke is trying to achieve." Kaspar experiences this exact jolt when he questions what exactly he has just said, and it leads him to the

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[81] Malkin., p. 30
[82] Read., p. 135
[83] Malkin., p. 33

awareness of language's dominance over reality and his life. The jolt forces him to analyze how he learned language, and the more aware he becomes of this process, the more his madness sets in, leading to his inevitable self-destruction. It is the ambivalence of this jolt that Handke picks up in his second full-length play *The Ride Across Lake Constance.*

The Ride Across Lake Constance:

> It's a winter night. A man rides across Lake Constance without sparing his horse. When he arrives on the other side, his friends congratulate him profusely, saying "What a surprise! How did you ever make it! The ice is no more than an inch thick!" The rider hesitates briefly, then drops off his horse. He is instantly dead
>
> M.R.

Michael Roloff's translation of Handke's *Ride Across Lake Constance* begins with this reference to Gustav Schwab's ballad about Germany's legendary horseman. In "The Horseman and Lake Constance" Schwab depicts a treacherous ride across a frozen lake. After braving this winter night, the Horseman arrives at a town across the lake and receives a warm welcome from its inhabitants. The townspeople gather to ask the horseman to recount his story of crossing the frozen lake, and it is only then that he realizes the danger of his journey and the mortal peril he just lived through. During his ride, he had been completely unaware of the ice he was riding over. For no reason other than fear, the rider dies. Undoubtedly, the title of Handke's play refers to this legendary tale and asks the question: 'what kind of thin ice might we be on without knowing it?"

The Ride Across Lake Constance has no plot in the traditional sense and features a total of eight characters, five of which play a more central role. By giving his characters

the names of famous actors- Emil Jannings, Heinrich George, Elisabeth Bergner, Erich von Stroheim, Henny Porten and the Kessler twins- Handke wants to indicate that in performances of the play, the actors are to play themselves rather than portray other characters in the play. The play consists of a series of conversations between the characters, which do not create any sort of storyline. Thus, "[s]ince this Ride is a plotless 'play,' and characterization is incidental," I concur with Lederer that, "our best approach to understanding the work is to analyze specific moments and to see if any pattern emerges." [84] I shall show that such a pattern does indeed emerge in that the individual scenes develop towards a moment of fleeting freedom and well being that is then followed by a downward spiral into madness.

The first words in the play, are spoken by Jannings while clearing his throat as if awakening: "As I said. As I said. A bad moment."[85,86] These words indicate that what is about to occur on stage has already been said, and also set the tone for the development of the play. From the first sentence on, the audience suspects that what is about to follow is going to be a series of unfortunate events, misunderstandings, and confusions; and sure enough these bad moments set in, in the form of misunderstood gestures. Jannings points at a cigar box hoping that George will pass it to him, but George interprets it as a sign for him to look at the box. During a later exchange, George again fails to understand one of Jannings' communicative hand gestures. In getting George to agree with the principle that one should not talk about something one does not know, "Jannings makes the

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[84] William Lederer, "Handke's Ride," *Chicago Review* 26, no. 2 (1974)., p.171
[85] Peter Handke, *The Ride across Lake Constance* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1976)., p.74
[86] "Wie gesagt. Wie gesagt. Ein schlimmer Moment"., p.13
Peter Handke, *Der Ritt Ueber Den Bodensee* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970).

appropriate gesture with his hand, turning up his palm in the process."[87] [88] George misinterprets Jannings' gesture to mean that he is waiting for something to be placed in his palm and gives him the cigar box. In response to these miscommunications, Jannings responds, "That's not what I meant to say with that. It just seemed to me that you had noticed something on my hand". The very gesture that was meant to clinch a generalized truth is the catalyst for a new puzzlement. Such misunderstandings throughout the play serve to underscore the multivalence of nonverbal communication. The failures of these physical messages to bring about their desired effect force us to resort to words, thus emphasizing the importance of spoken language. However, as he did in *Kaspar,* Handke again calls the spoken word into question, in *The Ride Across Lake Constance.*

When Jannings had made his misunderstood gesture, indicating how nonsensical it was to talk about something he did not know about, George noticed Jannings' rings. The rings unlike the fictional kidney flambé that is unknown to George and can therefore not be talked about are physically present on stage and are used to show an interesting connection between language and reality. Though the rings originally belong to Jannings, by beginning with they look "as if they were made for me" and a series of statements ending with, "[a]nd they *have* always belonged to me,"[89] [90] George becomes the owner of the rings. As in *Kaspar*, language is able to create a new reality. Once the rings linguistically changed owners they do so physically as well. This idea of language shaping reality is further developed by a discussion about common expressions. In this

[87] Hadke. *Constance., p78*
[88] „Jannings macht eine entsprechende Handbewegung, wobei er die Handfläche nach oben kehrt.", p.17
[89] Handke. *Constance., p.* 82
[90] Und sie *haben* immer schon mir gehört., p. 21

scene, George is attempting to convince Jannings that born losers, troublemakers, and criminals do in fact exist:

> George: Have you ever heard people talk about a "born loser"?
> Jannings: Frequently
> George: And have you ever heard the expression "born troublemaker"?
> Jannings: Indeed
> George: And the expression "born criminal"?
> Jannings: Of course.
> George: But the expression "a scurrying snake"- that you have heard quite frequently?
> Jannings: No, never.
> George: And have you heard of a "fiery Eskimo"?
> Jannings: Not that I know.
> George: If you don't know it, then you haven't heard of it either. But the expression "a flying ship"- that you have heard?
> Jannings: At most in a fairy tale.
> George: But scurrying snakes *exist?*
> Jannings: Of course not.
> George: But fiery Eskimos- they exist?
> Jannings: I can't imagine it.
> George: But flying ships exist?
> Jannings: At most in a dream.
> George: Not in reality?
> Jannings: Not in reality.
> (Pause)
> George: But born losers?
> Jannings: Consequently, they do exist.
> George: And born troublemakers?
> Jannings: They exist.
> George: And therefore there are born criminals?
> Jannings: It's only logical.
> George: As I wanted to say at the time…[91] [92]

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[91] Handke. *Constance., p. 84*
[92] George: „Haben sie noch nie von einem ‚geborenen Versager' reden hören."
Jannings: „Schon oft."
George: „Und haben Sie schon den Ausdruck ‚geborener Störenfried' gehört?"
Jannings: „Allerdings."
George: „Und den Ausdruck ‚geborener Verbrecher'?"
Jannings: „Freilich"
George: „Aber den Ausdruck ‚eine krabbelnde Schlange' - den haben Sie schon öfter gehört? „
Jannings: „Noch nie."
George: „Und haben Sie jemals von einem ‚feurigen Eskimo' gehört? „
Jannings: „Nicht daß ich wüsste".
George: „Wenn Sie es nicht wissen, dann haben Sie auch nicht davon gehört. Aber den Ausdruck ‚ein fliegendes Schiff'- den haben Sie gehört."
Jannings: „Höchstens in Märchen."

It seems as if George uses language as almost a transitive property to determine reality. This is to say that if there is a common expression for something then it must be real and can shed its quotation marks. The expression "born troublemaker" becomes the guarantor for a real born troublemaker. If this matter is pushed even further, can we relate it back to *Kaspar*? If one were to see a scurrying snake, would it actually not be there? Because, as we recall from *Kaspar*, if we see something differently from the way we speak it, we must be mistaken.

This idea is picked up again when Henny Porten makes her entrance on stage. As she descends the staircase, George and Jannings watch from below and count each stair she steps on. During her first attempt, they count from one through seven, skipping the number six. Porten is therefore unable to stand on that step and runs back up the flight of stairs. During her second attempt, George and Jannings count through seven, allowing Porten to reach the seventh step. Unaware, however, that the staircase consists of eight steps, she stumbles at the bottom, staggers into the room, gasps for air and runs back up the stairs. During her third and final attempt, Von Stroheim leads her down the stairs while the two at the bottom count to nine. At eight, they have reached the floor but with

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George: „Aber es *gibt* krabbelnde Schlangen?"
Jannings: „Selbstverständlich nicht."
George: „Aber feurige Eskimos- die gibt es?"
Jannings: „Ich kann es mir nicht vorstellen."
George: „Aber fliegende Schiffe gibt es?"
Jannings: „Höchstens in Traum."
George: „In Wirklichkeit nicht?"
Jannings: „Nicht in Wirklichkeit."
George: „Aber geborene Versager?"
Jannings: „Die gibt es demnach."
George: „Und geborene Störenfriede?"
Jannings: „Es gibt sie."
George: „Und es gibt demnach geborene Verbrecher?"
Jannings: „Logisch"
George: „Wie ich also damals sagen wollte... „

the ninth count, they walk down one more step, bounce on the floor, and stagger into the room together. Porten turns around to escape, but Von Stroheim does not let her. In this scene, reality again does not coincide with the spoken word and it seems as if Porten is unable to defy what is being said. Her actions can be interpreted in two different ways, both elaborating on the power of language: either it has complete control over Porten or over her reality. If we take a look at her first attempt in light of the first interpretation, it is as if by counting a step, George and Jannings are giving Porten permission to descend. However, since the characters have yet to meet and Porten is most likely unaware of George's and Jannings' existence while she is making her entrance, it can be assumed that it is not George and Jannings themselves, but their words that are determining her actions. By not counting the sixth step, she cannot step on it and must return to the top of the stairs. When considering the latter interpretation, it is not Porten but the reality in which she exists that is controlled by language. In her second attempt, Porten trips over the eighth step after trying to walk onto the stage from the seventh step. It is notable that she then gasps for air before running back up because it is as if she cannot breathe on stage. Porten's first and final attempt are examples of situations in which language determines reality. However, through her second attempt, Handke is demonstrating a situation in which reality does not conform to language. The eighth step was not counted, and therefore, this step and the stage exist in a nonlinguistic reality. That which remains unspoken is not real, for Porten, it is unreal enough to reject her and prevent her from existing in this nonlinguistic realm. Handke is thus at least suggesting the possibility of a nonlinguistic reality, but he is simultaneously showing by Porten's inability to breathe in it (and her being rejected by it) that we humans cannot exist in this nonlinguistic reality.

Through this example, Handke like Wittgenstein is arguing that although this nonlinguistic reality exists, it is not accessible to humans.

Porten's entrance onto the stage can thus be seen as illustrating one of Wittgenstein's most cited reamrks: "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world."[93] Language not only creates the boundaries of our world, but the world itself. The extent of our language is the extent of our reality:

> It is because we have this language that we come to have this world, not before or after we use the language, but with and while we use it. The imposition is logical, not chorological. To assert that the limits of my language mean the limits of my world is to assert that language is not a coat or map which we make to fit some previously established limit but that it is an activity which is bound up with the development of the limits themselves.[94]

According to Wittgenstein, accessible reality is completely dependent on language. Two epiphanies experienced by Von Stroheim and Porten, make it seem as if Handke would agree with Wittgenstein. In the first, Von Stroheim explains: "I was sitting by a lakeshore in the morning and the lake was sparkling. Suddenly I noticed: the lake is *sparkling.* It really is sparkling"[95,96]. Porten relates an almost identical story in which someone tells her that his pockets were empty, and they turned out to in fact be empty. These seemingly unremarkable revelations are actually moments in which the characters understand a correlation between reality and language. What they were thinking to say or what they were told, correlated to what was real. However, in as much as these epiphanies seem to support the commonly held notion that language describes what

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[93] Hamilton., p.12

[94] T.R. Martland, "On "the Limits of My Language Mean the Limits of My World" " *The Review of Metaphysics* 29, no. 1 (1975)., p. 20

[95] Handke. *Constance. p. 114*

[96] „Ich saß am Morgen am Ufer eines Sees, und der See glitzerte. Plötzlich fiel mir auf: der See *glitzert.* Er glitzert ja wirklich.“, p. 56

actually happens in the world, the shock these characters experience from their revelations seems almost laughably exaggerated. It is laughable perhaps because we never stop to think about how language applies to reality. We just assume it does and thus never experience the kind of shock the characters do. Furthermore, their shock forces the audience to consider if the idea that language always smoothly correlates to reality is true. Would Porten's pocket not have been empty if this had not been verbalized? Therefore, it is as if this scene rather than exemplifying Wittgenstein's philosophy perhaps even contradicts it. The characters' shock provokes the audience to reflect on the fact that linguistic images do not necessarily *have* to correlate to reality and forces them to reflect on the extent to which they are valid or real.

It is evident that much of what Handke argues in *The Ride Across Lake Constance* either resembles or expands on themes present in *Kaspar*. As in the first play, language is again used to bring about order or to thwart confusion. In a scene in which Elizabeth Bergner becomes completely disoriented and is unable to control her movements as she is applying her makeup, it is language that relieves her uncertainty. Only after starting to speak with Henny Porten does she become lucid and secure in her actions (47). Language has again brought about order; however, this is not to say that Handke uses his second play to only reiterate his previous thoughts. As already indicated, in *The Ride Across lake Constance,* Handke develops his ideas on language further and also brings in body language. He especially tries to prove that our gestures, like spoken language, have become automated responses conditioned by clichés rather than independent, meaningful actions that break the mould of the usual.

During the aforementioned scene, in which language brings about order, Bergner recalls: "Once I wanted to put a tablecloth on a table, I was with my thoughts at the seashore and caught myself shaking the tablecloth as if wanting to wave with it."[97, 98] In response, Porten questions Bergner's use of the word "caught," asking why Bergner implies guilt and did not simply use phrases like "I saw myself" or "I noticed". Porten is questioning why wanting to use a tablecloth for something other than what its name indicates is so wrong. Must our actions be limited by language? As the interaction between Porten and Bergner continues, this question is examined even further.

> Porten: Someone keeps looking over his shoulder while he's walking. Does he have a guilty conscience?
> Bergner: No, he simply looks over his shoulder from time to time.
> Porten: Someone is sitting there with lowered head. Is he sad?
> Bergner: No he simply sits there with lowered head.
> Porten: Someone is flinching. Conscience-stricken?
> Bergner: No he's simply flinching
> Porten: Two people sit there, don't look at each other, and are silent. Are they angry with one another?
> Bergner: No, they simply sit there, don't look at each other, and are silent!
> Porten: Someone bangs on the table. To get his way?
> Bergner: Couldn't he for once simply bang on the table?[99, 100]

In this exchange, Handke presents certain actions that tend to be interpreted in a set way, thus, controlling and limiting our perceptions of the world around us. He is intentionally

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[97] Handke. *Constance., p. 107*
[98] Einmal, während ich ein Tischtuch über einen Tisch breiten wollte, war ich in Gedanken am Ufer des Meeres und ertappte mich dabei, wie ich das Tischtuch schüttelte, als ob ich damit winken wollte., p.48
[99] Handke. *Constance., p. 107-108*

[100] Porten: Jemand schaut sich öfter um, während er geht: hat er ein schlechtes Gewissen?
Bergner: Nein, er schaut sich nur einfach öfter um!
Porten: Jemand sitzt mit gesenktem Kopf da: er ist traurig?
Bergner: Nein, er sitzt einfach nur mit gesenktem Kopf da!
Porten: Jemand zuckt zusammen: schuldbewusst?
Bergner: Nein, er zuckt nur einfach zusammen!
Porten: Zwei sitzen da, schauen einander nicht an und schweigen: sind sie böse aufeinander?
Bergner: Nein, sie sitzen nur einfach da, schauen einander nicht an und schwiegen!
Porten: Jemand schlägt auf den Tisch: um seinen Willen durchzusetzen?
Bergner: Darf er nicht einmal nur einfach auf den Tisch schlagen?, p.48-49

presenting the audience with scenarios that they have witnessed and presumably drawn conclusions from. "To Handke, language and action have become clichés, binding rather than liberating the thought which translates them."[101] We attribute definite meaning to actions and therefore do not allow them to stand for themselves. According to Bergner and Porten, actions like language have the power to control what we think is real. The automatism surrounding actions (and language) causes us to leap to conclusions about situations, and people determine their interpretations of reality on the basis of actions with prescribed meanings. Furthermore, once we ascribe a certain meaning to an action, it is difficult to separate the two. Handke is asking the audience to answer Bergner's question: "couldn't he for once simply bang on the table?" Must our actions be limited to one certain meaning? Have our actions become as clichéd as our language?

The interpretations Porten applies to the actions she described in the previous scene seem quite reasonable to the audience because on many occasions those actions do in fact signify the expected meaning. However, in order to emphasize his point that one cannot, or should not, *always* assume certain meanings, Handke presents exaggerated and unreasonable associations with actions.

> Jannings: The riding crop on the table, that means: someone who's very close to you will be swallowed up by a swamp and you will stand there slowly clapping your hands above your head. A guitar falls off the table, that means: hats staggering into glacial fissures during the next mountain-climbing expedition.[102, 103]

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[101] June Schlueter, *Metafictional Characters in Modern Drama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979)., p.113

[102] Handke. *Constance. 157*

[103] Die *Reitgerte* auf dem Tisch, das bedeutet: jemand, der dir am nächsten ist, wird im Moor versinken, und du wirst dabei stehen und langsam die Hände über dem Kopf zusammenschlagen! Eine Gitarre fällt vom Tisch, das bedeutet: Hüte, die bei der nächsten Bergwanderung in Gletscherspalten torkeln., p. 99

According to Lederer, this scene shows that language can mean everything and nothing: "It means whatever we want it to mean. Language can relate countless associations with an object but it can never tell us what the object is. Language is a convention arrived at by consensus, but in Handke's Ride there is no consensus."[104] Although Lederer raises a valid point, he fails to adress *why* Handke's play never arrives at any sort of consensus. For Handke as well, language can mean everything while simultaneously meaning nothing. He leaves the door open for the interpretation of language and purposely never gives anything a definite or expected meaning. Handke does not want language or actions to become trite and limited in their significance. He fears that by allowing unitary meanings, we will become automatons, acting and also interpreting actions without thought or reflection.

This fear is perhaps best depicted through Handke's portrayal of the dissociation of gesture:

> Von Stroheim turns Porten around, so that she stands with her back to him and walks back a step. Pause. George coughs. Still sitting, Jannings gives him a kick. George, standing by the table, jerks forward a little; but Porten, as if she had been kicked tumbles across the stage toward the sofa and remains lying in front of it. In fact, Von Stroheim had already lifted his knee to administer the kick. Pause. Startled, they all look at each other. [105,106]

In this scene we see a detachment of gesture between the person for whom it is intended and the person who actually receives it. From watching the interaction between Porten and Von Stroheim, Jannings is able to anticipate Von Stroheim's action. He realizes that

[104] Lederer., p. 175
[105] Handke. *Constance., p. 97*
[106] „Stroheim dreht Henny Porten herum, so daβ sie mit dem Rücken zu ihm steht, und geht einen Schritt zurück. Pause. George hustet. Jannings gibt ihm im Sitzen einen Tritt. George, der am Tisch steht, ruckt nur ein wenig vornüber, aber Henny Porten, als wäre sie es gewesen, die getreten worden ist, fällt über die Bühne auf das Sofa zu und bleibt davor liegen. Wirklich hatte Erich von Stroheim schon das Knie zum Tritt gehoben. Pause. Erschrocken schauen alle einander an., p.37

Von Stroheim intends to kick Porten and performs the action before Von Stroheim has the opportunity to do so himself. The intended result of the kick is achieved, however, because although Jannings physically kicks George, it is Porten who falls to the ground. Handke's creation of dissociated gestures is a physical representation of the way in which we assign a singular, prescribed meaning to certain gestures and shape our perception of reality accordingly. By this I mean that through the detachment of action and consequence, Handke is demonstrating how the language of gesture we utilize is limited enough that it can be picked up by an unrelated individual. Handke is criticizing the extent to which we have allowed actions to be restricted in significance. Without giving it a second thought, Janning's leaps to the conclusion that Von Stroheim is wanting to kick Porten; it is an automated interpretation that is ultimately correct because, in the world Handke created, Von Stroheim's gestures can *only* have one meaning. At the end of this exchange, the characters are understandably "startled". However, their shock seems to be a result of the implications of what just occurred than from the actual event. The characters come to the realization that their gestured language is as restricted in meaning as the spoken word. They have become automatons, associating only one meaning with each action and never allowing actions to stand for themselves.

Analogous to *Kaspar*, the characters in *The Ride Across Lake Constance* experience a moment of harmony in the middle of the play. Whereas for the former it was occasioned by acceptance of conventional language, for the latter it is caused by a freedom from the confinements of language and gesture. However, their freedom is just as short lived as Kaspar's sense of comfort within language. Even in the midst of celebrating their independence, they fall back under the control of unitary meanings:

> Only once [during their celebration] they become briefly uncertain and quiet: one of the women stands leaning against the banister, her face turned away and her shoulders twitching. After an anxious moment, one of the men walks up to her and turns her timidly around; she is laughing quietly, and by and by they all become merry again"[107 ,108]

The characters are simply incapable of truly escaping their prescribed interpretation of this action. Because they could not see her face, when the characters saw a woman's shoulders twitching they automatically assumed she was crying. This almost innate reaction marks the beginning of the characters' loss of freedom, and their return to unitary meanings for both language and gesture. This return is cemented when the characters observe the physical equivalent, or what they *assume* to be the physical equivalent, of certain expressions. For example, when Jannings shows the rest of the characters a pin, they react with baffling astonishment:

> Von Stroheim: A pin? You don't mean "the pin"
> Jannings: The very one.
> Porten: And it really exists? It isn't merely a figure of speech?
> Jannings: Here, see for yourself.
> (*He hands the pin to George, who hands it to Von Stroheim very matter-of-factly,*
> *who hands it to Porten)*
> Porten: It has all turned out to be true. Not even the ruby-red pin head is missing. It has all come true.[109 ,110]

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[107] Handke. *Constance.,* p 110

[108] „Nur einmal werden sie für kurze Zeit unsicher und still: eine der Frauen steht abgewendet, an das Treppengeländer gelehnt, und ihre Schultern zucken. Nach einer Schrecksekunde geht einer der Männer auf sie zu und dreht sie ängstlich um: sie lacht still, und alle lassen sich nach und nach wieder von ihr anstecken.", p. 52

[109] Handke. *Constance.,* p.112-113

[110] „Stroheim: Eine Stecknadel? Sie meinen doch nicht "die Stecknadel"?
Jannings: Gerade die.
Henny Porten: Und es gibt sie wirklich? Es ist nicht nur eine Redensart?
Jannings: Überzeugen Sie sich selber
(*Er reicht die Nadel weiter an George, der sie wie selbstverständlich an Stroheim weitergibt, der sie Henny Porten überreicht.)*
Henny Porten: Es trifft alles zu. Nicht einmal der "rubinrote Kopf" fehlt. Es ist alles eingetroffen., p. 55

Once the sight of a pin evokes its identification with the proverbial pin in the haystack, the characters begin their downward spiral back into a system of pre-judgment and limited meanings. Before their decline, the characters experience a moment of freedom from set interpretations. "In proposing a denial of interpretation Handke is attempting to have his figures overcome the mediated nature of language so that each gesture will then have no signifying function, and will not be able to 'stand for' or 'mean' anything other than itself." [111] The fact that their previous freedom has become so fleeting indicates perhaps that escaping the mediated nature of language is in fact not possible. Handke is suggesting that, at best, we can hope to become aware of this system of interpretation. He anticipates that through this awareness, his readers will avoid falling into the trap of this system and will not allow it to force them into a state of somnambulism.

Handke's concern with the predictability of actions can be attributed to his concern with the conformist nature of people, which was clearly expressed in *Kaspar* through Handke's use of the clones. Schlueter sees an analogous concern in *The Ride Across Lake Constance:*

> So long as the action remains original there is the possibility of original character. Once it becomes locked into patterns, however, the possibility ceases, and what is produced is that kind of interchangeable personality Handke suggests through the entrance of the Kessler twins.[112]

The Kessler twins play a small role within the play, acting and speaking in a similar manner. Like the other Kaspars, the twins can be seen as mirror images of each other, nearly parallel in their movements as well as in their looks. The Kessler twins disappear from the stage immediately after their actions start to contradict each other. It is not

[111] Linstead., p. 79
[112] Schlueter., p. 114

surprising, that only after their exit do the characters return to being automatons, for the Kessler twins are the characters who best follow the system of prescribed responses. Like the other Kaspars, they serve as the ideal citizens in the systematic world Handke has created; they are in no way unique individuals and only act according to the rules and expectations of language. "Handke is obviously aware of the stagnation of the creation of character not only in drama but in life. His plays dramatize the fact that identity is no longer an individual's essence, but the product of prescribed responses."[113] Perhaps Handke's argument is best expressed through Von Stroheim as he is teaching Jannings (and indirectly the audience) that gestures can in fact only have a singular meaning.

> Jannings: Someone suddenly puckers up his mouth and nose (*He shows how.)* Because he's afraid and a coward?
> Von Stroheim: Unless his actions prove the opposite.
> Jannings: But if there's nothing to do?
> Von Stroheim: What else would he be afraid of?
> Jannings: I don't understand that.
> Von Stroheim: What you're sitting on is an easy chair, isn't it?
> Jannigs: Yes.
> Von Stroheim: Or is it perhaps a life preserver? (*Jannings laughs at this extraordinary suggestion.)* It seems just as ridiculous to you when I claim that you are sitting on a life preserver as it would to claim that someone's mouth and nose pucker up (*He imitates it.*) because he feels like doing something.
> Jannings: But an easy chair is an easy chair, and an expression (*He makes one*) is an expression. How can the two be compared?
> Von Stroheim: I will demonstrate to you how one can.(*Pause. They all wait. Pause. Von Stroheim suddenly)* What do you have in your mouth? (*Jannings quickly takes the cigar out of his mouth and puts it out. Von Stroheim smiles)*Why is your collar button open? (*Jannings nimbly closes his collar button)* You are so serious (*Jannings laughs resoundingly. Pause. Quiet. Pause)*[114] [115]

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113 Schlueter., p.116

114 Handke. *Constance., p. 117-118*

115 „Jannings: Jemandem zieht es plötzlich (*Er macht es vor*) Mund und Nasenlöcher zusammen: weil er Angst hat und ein Feigling ist?
Stroheim: Es sei denn, er beweist durch die Tat das Gegenteil.
Jannings: Wenn es aber nichts zu tun gibt?
Stroheim: Wovor hätte er sonst Angst?

During this exchange, Von Stroheim claims that actions are as precise as definitions. To assign a different meaning to a specific action is as absurd as calling a chair a life preserver. Moreover, Von Stroheim shows Jannings how predictable and inherent some responses have become. Jannings reacts in the way Von Stroheim expects him to without giving his actions a second thought. The fact that Von Stroheim can anticipate Jannings actions proves that they are not unique to him, but that they have become prescribed responses completely devoid of individuality. In this scene, Jannings acts in a way not unlike one of the Kessler twins.

The ending of Handke's second play bears a striking resemblance to *Kaspar* in that it too ends in noise as a howling emanates from an undisclosed location. The characters are all huddled together on stage unable to communicate with one another.

> The consciousness of reality becomes a deadly embrace for the characters in the play through the traps and ties of language. With knowledge of the orders and hierarchies of language, communication between the characters becomes impossible. At the end of the play, all the characters sit crammed and silent on the stage, afraid that any cry for help could lead to a misunderstanding. [116]

Having realized the impact of language on reality (whether it is by completely shaping it or being limited in its ability to convey information about it), the characters begin to

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Jannings: Das verstehe ich nicht.
Stroheim: Das, worauf Sie sitzen, ist ein Sessel, nicht wahr?
Jannings: Ja.
Stroheim: Oder ist es vielleicht ein Schwimmreifen? (Jannings lacht über die Zumutung). Genauso lächerlich, wie es Ihnen vorkommt, wenn ich behaupte, dass Sie auf einem Schwimmreifen sitzen, wäre es demnach, zu behaupten, dass sich jemanden (er macht es nach) Mund und Nasenlöcher zusammenziehen, er *Lust* hat, etwas zu tun.
Jannings: Aber ein Sessel ist ein Sessel, und eine Miene (*er macht sie*) ist eine Miene. Wie kann man beides vergleichen?
Stroheim: Ich werde Ihnen vorführen, wie man beides vergleichen kann. (*Pause. Man wartet. Pause. Stroheim, plötzlich)* Was haben Sie da im Mund? (*Jannings nimmt die Zigarre schnell heraus und drückt sie aus. Stroheim lächelt)* Warum steht Ihr Kragenknopf offen? (*Jannings schließt behend den Kragenknopf)* Sie sind so ernst? (*Jannings lacht SCHALLEND. Pause. Stille. Pause).*

[116] Claus Peymann and Claus Brucher- Herpel, "Directing Handke," *The Drama Review* 16, no. 2 (1972).

understand the all encompassing power language has. In the end, they choose silence over the restrictions and control brought about by language. Too afraid to risk making a mistake in their language and fall through the ice into the abyss of madness, they refuse to communicate with one another at all. By becoming negligent and allowing language to take such a domineering role in their lives and relationships, language has imposed so many rules on the characters that they can no longer utilize it. They are left in a kind of catatonic state, unable to speak or move- seemingly insane like Kaspar.

It is interesting to note, however, that immediately before the stage turns dark, Bergner begins to smile. While all the other characters are left mute out of fear, Bergner seems to be just awakening. Throughout the play, its motto "Are you speaking or are you dreaming"[117] is constantly depicted by its characters who are often described as walking around with almost closed eyelids, rubbing their eyes as if waking from sleep, or pinching themselves. According to Linstead, Bergner is the one that is most portrayed as being asleep or near-sleep. "Indeed, Bergner, throughout the whole play seems for the most part cut off from or immune to the action. […] Her almost constant state of being asleep is indicative of the extent to which she is untouched by the realizations the others achieve."[118] However, Linstead's claim that Bergner never achieves awareness throughout the play is debatable. Especially during the scene with Porten (described on page 31), Bergner seems to share the same realizations as the other characters, suggesting that some of her remarks that seemingly indicate her oblivion, have sarcastic undertones:

> It's nice to watch when something is beginning to function smoothly. It's like watching a sale: move after move. Here the goods, there the money! Here the money, there the goods! Or like listening to two people talking:

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[117] "Träumt Ihr oder redet Ihr?"
[118] Michael Linstead, *Outer World and Inner World: Socialisation and Emancipation in the Works of Peter Handke, 1964-1981* (Frankfurt am Main: Weihert-Druck GmbH, 1988)., p. 80

> first the question, then the reply. Someone holds out his hand, the other shakes it. How are you, I'm fine! How do you like him, I think he's okay! Someone gets up, you're already leaving? Someone sighs, and you pat him. Oh, that's beautiful.[119]

It is important to note that this is Bergner's response to the scene of dissociation of gesture, and thus describing that scene as functioning smoothly seems either completely sarcastic or simply incorrect. At the very least, even if her comments were not meant in jest and she does in fact remain unconscious of language for the majority of the work, she awakens at the end of the play, opening her eyes and again starting the cycle of seeking awareness of language's control over us. While the other characters have returned to their somnambulant state of allowing language to have complete control, Bergner does exactly what Handke hopes we all will and "opens her eyes." In doing so, she resists the smoothly functioning system she described of thoughtless language and automated responses. Bergner follows Handke's advice and begins to question a reality that is as effortless as a sale. The author urges his readers to not withdraw from language out of fear, but to engage in it even if it means having to begin a cycle of bad moments. Only when we confront language and its possible dangers, can we come to any kind of understanding about it.

Like the ice preventing the horseman from falling to his death, language is what separates us from madness.

> The ride parallels the functioning of grammar, of our system of co-ordinating perception and meaning, and of our linguistic and sentient powers of reason; it is only a provisional, preamble order, which, particularly when, as in Handke's play, it becomes conscious of its own

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[119] Handke. *Constance.,* p. 97

existence, is threatened by somnambulism, schizophrenia and madness[120, 121]
Therefore, according to Handke, language is not only completely necessary, but also incredibly fragile. He, like Wittgenstein, acknowledges that language is what allows us to communicate properly and prevents confusion. However, the regulations on language (including grammar, syntax, structure etc) result in *its* fragility and in *our* vulnerability when using language. Therein perhaps, lies the greatest of paradoxes Handke associates with language: the very medium that allows us to discover the world also limits it.

Conclusion:

Wittgenstein's influence on Handke has been either overestimated or underappreciated. For the most part, it seems as if his plays have either been forced to fit Wittgenstein's ideas or to completely contradict them. However, it is unnecessary to take a definitive stance on this matter. It suffices to say that Handke was well aware of Wittgenstein's philosophies and that traces of them appear within his works. What is incontestable, however, is the importance both assign to language.

Being concerned almost exclusively with a philosophically sound investigation into the limits of knowledge, Wittgenstein's ideas are perhaps too theoretical to directly apply to society. Therefore, by incorporating Wittgenstein into his works, Handke allows some of Wittgenstein's ideas to be translated into our life. Nevertheless, Handke's primary concern is not philosophy, but language and how it affects our society. In both plays, awareness is what Handke advocates:

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[120] Quoting Botho Strauss in *Theater Heute*
[121] Hern., p.93

> What bothers me is people's alienation from their own speech. In a way, this is the basic trouble with the young revolutionaries in Germany: they're alienated from their language. It isn't *their* language anymore, so they can't even communicate. […] To me, at least, this is true: when people are alienated from their language and their speech, as workers from their products, they are alienated from the world as well.[122]

Taking into consideration the power Handke associates with language, it is logical that he would want us to be conscientious when utilizing it. We must not only be aware of language, but able to make use of it properly, for if we cannot control language then we are in danger of it controlling us. Being dominated by language is what Handke fears most and what he criticizes our society for in both of his plays. We have become so unaware of language that we neither use it correctly nor notice its dominance over us. By accepting language's prescribed meanings (both in spoken and gestured form), we are giving it complete control over us. If we do not stop to consider other interpretations, we consign ourselves to a limited horizon. Furthermore, especially in *Kaspar,* Handke questions who exactly has assigned meanings to language because if they control language, they, in turn, control us.

After taking both plays into consideration, it becomes clear that Handke fears becoming subservient to language because it will result in a loss of individuality. In both works, Handke addresses the conformist nature of people and fears that by not questioning language's control, we will all become automatons. Handke is aware that we as humans are prone to mimicry, and it seems as if Handke is warning his readers to realize the cascade of events that will occur if they blindly "consent" to language. Given that society determines language, by never challenging language, we will never contest

[122] Joseph., p. 61

societal expectations. Therefore, we will inevitably conform to society and be stripped of our individuality.

Through his plays Handke urges his readers to resist this fate by exploring the possibilities and the nature of language. Handke wants us to take a lead from the characters of his plays, awaken from our comatose state, and challenge language and the limitations it places over us. After all, in the stage directions to *Kaspar*, Handke says that, “this event will last until the curtain falls at the end of the piece: because no story will take place, the audience will not be in a position to imagine that there is a sequel to the story”[123, 124]. Handke does not allow for the possibility of a theatrical sequel because the play and its message should continue within us. *Kaspar* ends in a final tragic way so that the audience witnessing Kaspar’s demise will make conscious efforts to resist following him to his doom. *The Ride Across Lake Constance* also ends in a state of confusion, but one that is not nearly as ominous as that in *Kaspar.* Through the ending of the second play, we realize, Handke is telling us not to completely resist language, but to closely examine it. The final scene of *The Ride Across Lake Constance,* the play in which the development of Handke’s concept of language finally comes to an end, exhorts the audience to reengage language rather than resign to its overwhelming power.

[123] Handke., p. 12
[124] “Dieser Vorgang wird solange dauern, bis am Schluss des Stücks der Vorhang zugehen wird: weil keine Geschichte vor sich gehen wird, können sich die Zuschauer auch keine Nachgeschichte vorstellen, höchstens ihre eigene.“, p. 8

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